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Kacey Dowd Tillman, *Stripped and Script: Loyalist Women Writers of the American Revolution* *Stripped and Script: Loyalist Women Writers of the American Revolution* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), pp. 224. ISBN: 9781625344328. Paperback, \$28.95.

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Book review: Kacey Dowd Tillman, *Stripped and Script: Loyalist Women Writers of the American Revolution* *Stripped and Script: Loyalist Women Writers of the American Revolution*.



Women who existed along the broad spectrum of Loyalist identity regularly conceived of the American Revolution as a violation, an ongoing assault on their property, privacy, and personhood. This discursive phenomenon forms both the framework and argumentative foundation of Kacey Dowd Tillman's 2019 monograph *Stripped and Script: Loyalist Women Writers of the American Revolution*. Situated within the war years and immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary Era (1776–1792), Dowd Tillman shares the varied experiences of women who fell under the umbrella of 'Loyalism', a term that, though intuitively associated with political support for the rule of King George III, more often functioned as a catch-all description of those not aligned with the Patriot camp. Quaker women, whose experiences compose the second of five chapters and with whom this review is primarily concerned, knew the slipperiness of this term all too well. The author's adoption of a broad definition of Loyalism, imposed as much as it was actively claimed by women, allows her to successfully accomplish two broad goals: identify the common metaphor of assault across the writings of women whose 'Loyalism' could mean disaffection, royalism, neutrality, or pacifism and elevate the importance of the letter-journal genre for its ability to transcend the public/private paradigm and offer a space of rhetorical resistance.

Dowd Tillman's keen analyses of women's letters and letter-journals are a fresh addition to the standard fare of male political print culture ubiquitous in Revolutionary Era-studies. Far from capitulating to the long-held presumption that women could not be political creatures, the author argues that women used letters and letter-writing to construct what she terms 'paper bodies'. When Loyalist women felt their physical bodies subject to the rapacious incursions of wartime forces, they could assert control over their paper bodies and reshape the definitions of Loyalism used to disenfranchise them and their loved ones. Dowd Tillman reflects this diverse conception of Loyalism through the structure of the book itself, using each chapter to highlight a specific expression of Loyalist identity. Building from the assertion that letter-journals are not only 'historic artifacts but also literary texts' (p. 24), the book traverses the pages of women who regularly weighed in on political affairs despite their lack of access to the mechanisms of formal politics.

Dowd Tillman is particularly attendant to the instability of political categories during the Revolutionary Era in her treatment of Quaker women and pacifist experiences of wartime violence. The chapter 'Scripting Pacifism' quickly establishes that Friends' pacifism complicated the already ambiguous category of Revolutionary Loyalism. Unwilling to lend either their bodies or financial aid to military efforts and reluctant to align publicly with any camp, Quakers attracted the ire of multiple political factions. And though Quaker men were the primary targets of Patriot hostilities, Quaker women nonetheless suffered for their faith, as well as for their relationships with their husbands.

To demonstrate the cataclysmic stakes of being labelled a Loyalist—even when the accused considered themselves separate from the political aspects of the conflict altogether—the author dedicates her chapter ‘Scripting Pacifism’ to the wives of the 1777 Winchester Exiles. That year, Congress published a letter from the fictitious Spanktown Yearly Meeting alleging that several of Philadelphia’s most prominent Quaker merchants were conspiring as Loyalist spies. The letter was actually a pretense to imprison and seize the valuable property of men who refused to swear loyalty to Congress and make use of Continental currency. As a result, twenty-two men were prosecuted, condemned, and exiled to Winchester, VA (where two men died in custody), without ever standing trial.

By recounting the Spanktown controversy from the perspective of the letters and letter-diaries of the exiled men’s wives, Kacey Dowd Tillman brings a fresh perspective on the contested meanings of loyalty and sentiment to a familiar story. The author focuses primarily on the letter-diary of Sarah Logan Fisher, returning once again to the theme of violation in Logan Fisher’s frequent written outrage at what she perceived as Congress’ repeated trampling on civil liberties. Far from existing as a private space, the letter-diary functioned as a crucial site of women’s political activity, the author argues. Meticulously pulling apart Logan Fisher’s writing, Dowd Tillman successfully demonstrates that Quaker women were not merely echoing the sentiments of their male counterparts but using epistolary forms such as letter-diaries to construct their own political spheres and define pacifism for themselves.

Stepping into the formal world of politics became a necessity for the wives of the Winchester Exiles, however. Moving briefly from the in-between world of epistolary writing, Dowd Tillman concludes her chapter on Loyalism and pacifism by examining the petition Quaker women submitted to George Washington on behalf of their exiled husbands. The author uses the public document to great effect. Not only does Dowd Tillman mark how the women strategically positioned themselves as dependents anguished over their loved ones’ absence, but she also highlights Quaker women’s shrewd understanding of Patriot rhetoric. Petitioners made use of descriptive language that emphasised weakness, fragility, and burdens, effectively shaping the rhetoric of sympathy endemic to Patriot publications to their own benefit. Rejecting the label of Loyalist, Quaker women nonetheless clearly demonstrated their political awareness and willingness to lend their voices in service of their community.

A precise accounting of women’s words and worlds, Kacey Dowd Tillman’s *Stripped and Script* is a welcome addition to the literature on real and imagined Loyalists alike. Quaker women receive their full due as complex Revolutionary actors whose religious convictions and political motivations defied static categorisation. The notion that

women were not politically active because of their exclusion from formal politics, like the catch-all label of 'Loyalist', was frequently a flawed, if not outright incorrect presumption. Dowd Tillman's careful examination of women's writings is a powerful and persuasive rejoinder.

Competing Interests

I'm aboard member for the Friends Historical Association.

